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BRZEZINSKI  
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Almost three years after he left office, Zbigniew Brzezinski craves legitimacy -- not for himself but for all those who toil as national security advisers in the White House.

The craving has become a cause as the Polish-born foreign policy expert journeys about, promoting "Power and Principle," his memoirs of four years in the Carter administration.

For most of the Carter years, one heard of titanic clashes between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Brzezinski, the presidentially appointed national security adviser sometimes accused of conducting his own foreign policy.

The press often sided with the secretary of state, who it viewed as the legitimate conductor of American foreign policy. Brzezinski says this was because it did not understand his role or that the State Department had become a "fudge factory."

Brzezinski, in an interview, was adamant -- foreign policy is too important to be left to the State Department. What with defense needs and intelligence requirements, foreign policy must be coordinated under someone, reporting to the president -- a national security director.

After all, he argued, no one complains that when David Stockman does his job as budget director he is cutting into the turf of Donald Regan, the Treasury Secretary.

But when he did his job, Brzezinski said, there were howls he was cutting into the secretary of state's power.

To remedy this, he suggests the post of national security adviser be upgraded to national security director and have the post require Senate confirmation rather than be a simple presidential appointment.

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Brzezinski's vehemence on the subject spills out in his book as he portrays members of the Carter administration, from the president on down, as continually pumping, sometimes crashing, into each other on policy matters.

Large and small examples abound:

-- China tells the United States it is planning a small attack on Vietnam to teach it a lesson, and the administration nods with understanding. Then the secretary of the treasury shows up in Peking and makes contrary comments. What is a leader of the Chinese masses to think?

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